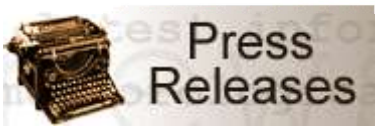

The Meteorological Office

PRESS OFFICE 21 April 1998 nr 317

WEATHER BALLOONS LAUNCHED AUTOMATICALLY

Most of the weather balloons released by The Met. Office in the UK are launched from eight sites around our coastline. However, in certain weather situations forecasters would like to see what the atmosphere looks like further inland.

To this end The Met. Office has successfully trialled an automatic weather balloon launching system, which when operational will provide vital extra information on the UK's weather.

Autosonde, as it is known, is made by the Finnish company Vaisala. The weather balloon and sampling equipment, collectively known as radiosondes, are loaded into the system, and at pre-programmed times the balloon will be inflated, the radiosondes calibrated, before the complete rig is ejected for its hour long journey high into the atmosphere.

The system can be installed almost anywhere power is available and only needs to be visited for servicing, and re-loading of the balloons and radiosondes.

Jim Caughey, Technical Director at The Met. Office said: " Good weather forecasts rely on accurate weather data. This project shows our willingness to invest in new systems which should eventually improve the services we offer to our customers and the public."

ENDS

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